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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003742

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SUBJECT: PROSPECTS FOR NEXT AFGHAN CONFERENCE

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne; Reasons (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In UNAMA's November 21 weekly ambassadorial-level meeting, UK Ambassador Sedwill announced that UK, U.S., French, and German capitals, and President Karzai had all concurred that the next conference on Afghanistan will take place on 28 January 2010 in London. According to the UK and French ambassadors, their governments had endorsed the London conference, and they have separately obtained President Karzai's endorsement. The two ambassadors also noted their governments' understanding that the White House had indicated support for a January London meeting in communications between capitals.

¶2. (C) The meeting should focus on security matters and be attended by foreign ministers (and possibly their defense counterparts) and the NATO SG, the UK Ambassador said. The UK has also suggested that non-NATO contributors attend the London meeting, which would review ISAF's role and Karzai's commitment to begin the process of taking over security responsibilities, as delineated in his inaugural speech. The British foresee PM Brown and President Karzai opening and closing the conference. The French Ambassador suggested the UNSG and the new EU Foreign Affairs representative also attend. UNAMA meeting participants recommended that the British host and the Afghans (Foreign Minister) chair the London meeting. This fits efforts to promote Afghan leadership and could help alleviate concerns about the London venue.

¶3. (C) SRSK Kai Eide mentioned that Foreign Minister Spanta had opposed holding the January conference in London, preferring the earlier plan to hold the first event in Kabul and a second event later abroad. To address Spanta's concerns, the UK Ambassador suggested that a JCMB reinforced from capitals to be held earlier in January to set the agenda for a March 2010 Afghan-hosted ministerial in Kabul. Ambassador Wayne and Canadian Ambassador Crosby recommended that if this scenario is agreed, that the March conference emphasize non-security issues, in particular, development and governance, and that the reinforced JCMB could identify the working agenda to prepare for the March conference. UNAMA meeting participants agreed it was premature to hold a summit meeting on Afghanistan; however, the German ambassador suggested setting the goal of a 2011 summit coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the Bonn Agreement signed at the Petersburg Conference. The consensus in this discussion was that if a conference was held in March in Kabul, it should be at the Ministerial level.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Wayne also recommended that we consider where reintegration/reconciliation might be touched upon and that we make efforts to bring key Muslim states into these processes. Canadian Ambassador Crosby recommended that the

next meeting of SRAPs, to be held in the UAE (date to be decided), might focus on Afghan reintegration and reconciliation strategies, Afghanistan's relations with its neighbors, and how to invite more participation from the Muslim world on these issues. Deputy Commerce Minister Adib Farhadi told Polcouns November 20 that National Security Advisor Rassoul had received an offer from Turkey or possibly Saudi Arabia to host such a conference. Farhadi mooted the idea of a Saudi-hosted conference on reconciliation, capped by an Islamic gathering in Mecca in April or May, once there is a way forward on talks with disaffected Taliban.

15. (C) In a separate meeting between the Charge and French Ambassador D'Amecourt November 21, D'Amecourt explained that the January 28 date was chosen primarily to accommodate PM Brown's political timetable, and to a lesser degree, German Chancellor Merkel's. The French ambassador was also much less categorical in how he characterized the USG position on the conference. Regarding security matters, D'Amecourt emphasized the need for Afghanistan to "take the lead" on security, adding that integration should also be addressed in London. He said the French endorsed the idea that Afghans chair the London meeting, noting the important symbolism of the Afghan Foreign Minister sitting between the UK and UNAMA. D'Amecourt also opined that the JCMB should take place in Kabul in mid-December. The JCMB should build upon President Karzai's inauguration speech, provide an opportunity to build donor consensus on and reinforcement of new Afghan government plans, and set the stage for the London meeting.

16. (C) The French ambassador also discussed what he saw as

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"three options" for creating a new and/or strengthen senior civilian position for Afghanistan:

--Appoint a special senior NATO civilian Rep. (preferably not an American), as a civilian counterpart to COMISAF. This would boost the concept of a civilian-led NATO, but could lead to a diminution of UNAMA's status;

--Create a strong "High Representative" position, following the Bosnia model, who could act on economic issues, governance, and anti-corruption. Again, this option would diminish UNAMA's role; or,

--Maintain the status quo, but beef-up UN presence, an option SRSG Kai Eide favors, but the French oppose.  
Mussomeli